

Measure of FAITH

Gen 22

It's father's day today of course as you know. And Brisbane's entry into the Queensland father of the year competition. Was a man by the name of David Howell from Bracken Ridge.

He didn't win it. But I think, he's a worthy nomination. For starters David Howell is a father to NINE KIDS. I reckon anyone who has nine kids should automatically get some kind of award.

He's got NINE KIDS. And at the same time as looking after his kids. And running a concreting business. David looked after his wife for five years as she got sicker and sicker, and eventually died of cancer.

And David's a Christian man. So he also works with the Salvos as well in the community. And if I had a vote I'd be more than happy..... to give it to a bloke like that for father of the year. He passes my test for a great dad.

But I wonder if you'd nominate father Abraham? Because I suspect after a cursory reading of Genesis 22, you might not.

I mean here's a guy. Out on a Father and son outing. But it's definitely not a camping trip.

Might get Abraham some points if they were. But they're not. They're on their way. With Isaac carrying the wood himself. They're marching up the mountain.

Where Father Abraham intends to Sacrifice his only son as a burnt offering to the Lord his God. Hardly father of the year stuff.

It's gut wrenchingly horrible stuff. And I know we've just covered the destruction of whole cities in the episode of Sodom and Gomorrah. But in some ways this seems worse. It's so personal.

Which is the point. Because unless you grapple with the grotesque nature of what unfolds here. Number one - You won't understand just how great Abraham's faith is. And number two - you won't get how great the God is. Who Abraham trusts. So they're the two things we're looking out for I'm flagging that up front.

Now we've just read the passage and you and I know the outcome. So that takes some of the heat out of it. Right from the start as you read it. There from verse 1 chapter 22. It's a TEST. Some time later, God TESTED Abraham.

But you have to sort of keep that knowledge up your sleeve. Because Abraham doesn't have verse 1 does he? He doesn't know it's a test. He doesn't have that information.

What he has. Is the bare word of God which comes to him as it has time and time again in the past. Sometimes promising. Sometimes re-assuring and reminding him of his promises.

This time. Verse 2. The bare word. Which must seem Unbearable.

"Abraham." "Here I am."

Take your son,

Take your son, your only son,

Take your son, your only son, Isaac,

Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love

Take him, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about. Full stop.

It's almost full circle from the first time he spoke to Abram back in Genesis 12.

Where God said. Go to a place I'll show you. This time Go sacrifice your only son on a mountain I'll tell you about.

Now what do you think of God at that point? If we did a phone poll. If we opened up the 1800 lines what do you think would be the response? I suspect – God would get the big thumbs down. And I suspect the advice to Abraham would be. Don't do it.

And this sort of stuff is a bit of a goldmine for God's critics. This is the sort of thing they'll point to and say. What barbarism. I could never believe in a God like that.

But the point is. This is exactly the God who's revealed himself to Abraham. This isn't a different God or God just having a bad day. Abraham's come to know the Lord his God. And we've seen his ups and downs along the way. And God's used those things. So you come to the point where God make s what looks like an **OUTRAGEOUS REQUEST...** And Abraham without knowing the why. Without knowing the ins and outs of the plan. Without a please explain.....Says I will. Because of how much he's come to **TRUST** the Lord his God. So as ridiculous as it

sounds. You haven't been through what he's been through. You haven't seen what he's seen. As strange as it sounds. His response is obedience.

And the torturous three days in front of Abraham. Will prove his trust worthwhile. As a great example for you and I.

Now if you're anything like me. You don't just want to know what Abraham DID. You want to know a bit more don't you. You want to know..... what's going on in his head. What's he THINKING? How's this make him feel?

And I'm sure if they did an Australian Story episode on this you'd get all that stuff. Abraham ruminating on what happened and how he felt.

But we're not told.

And I'm presuming, It's because it's so obvious that it goes without saying.

How would you feel? Take your son, your only son, who you love, and sacrifice him.

So you don't get a run down of Abraham's emotional state. What you get instead.... Is the short, painful, matter of fact details of the trip. I guess each step stabbing into Abraham's heart like it would any loving mum or dad.

He gets up early. Fuels up the donkey. Puts the saddle on. Chops up the wood. And the old axe has never felt heavier. On the other hand I guess Isaac's pretty excited to go on a trip. But dad, well, he's a bit underwhelming in his enthusiasm.

It's not even as though Abraham can send someone else to do the job. In chapter 21 if you read it you'll see Ishmael's mum Hagar. She has to go away from Ishmael because she can't bear to see him die. But Abraham

Has to saddle up the donkey. Chop the wood. Go the three day journey. Bonding more and more with his son. So he can climb the mountain. And carry out God's instructions...and do the deed himself.

So they head out and it's a fair sort of journey. The days go by. And I bet Abraham's wishing he'd just wake up from a bad dream. But read there verse 4.

⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.

And the reality's sinking in.

And Abraham tells the servants to wait behind. And from here on it's just. Father and Son.

Now don't for a minute think that somehow your faith is meant to make you feel all warm and comfortable about this picture. If this picture, if what's going on here doesn't tear you up inside. Then there's something wrong with you. And you better get it seen to.

And even if at other times you might like to trade places with Abraham....not here.... He can have this bit. This has got to be Abraham's blackest, most confusing, most troubled day ever. I mean when push comes to shove. Do you really trust.... Can you really do it? It's a black day for Abraham. But as it turns out. It's going to be his brightest as well.

And it's interesting to just pick up on a couple of subtle things along the way.

If you look at verse 5 you'll see the first one. He and Isaac are heading off and Abraham tells the servants. He says.

"Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Now that's an interesting way of describing what's about to go down. Is he out and out lying? Is it just too unbearable to say what's really about to happen?

Or is this a small insight into Abraham's faith?

See sacrifice for Abraham EQUALS worship. It's one of the outward things he does to show his fear and his reverence and his love and all those things and his trust for God.

So he says we're going to worship. To make a sacrifice.

We'll go and worship he says. THEN....we'll come back. WE'LL COME BACK.

Really? Did he mean to say that? I mean you could just write that off I suppose.

Maybe it's a slip of the tongue? Maybe he HAS to say that. WE'LL come back.

Knowing full well they won't. Or have Abraham's cognitive faculties been so tortured that he's in some sort of delusion? Is he in denial?

It could be any of those things. Or ...is it a small window into this man's faith. See you try to put yourself into Abraham's shoes. And you can try. But I don't think you really can. You haven't been through what he's been through. You haven't

experienced what he's experienced. Abraham's not you or I. Time and time again he's experienced in unique ways to him...that God's word can be trusted. Not least at the miraculous birth of Isaac. And God says – Isaac's the son of the promise. So when God says. Nations will come through him. With every bone in his body....He believes it. So he's got God's word of promise about Isaac on one hand. That's the first thing. On the other hand. God's word of command to sacrifice him.

God's word on one hand. Isaac is the son of the promise. On the other hand. God's word of command. Isaac must be sacrificed. Talk about being between rock and a hard place. How can those two things both stand?

But there's something else, he says. They're trekking up the mountain verse 7 And Isaac says. Hey Dad? Yes my son.

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

Hey dad...where's the sacrifice?

Now I'm sure.... I'll have to answer some tough questions from my kids at times. But how's he going to answer this?

And maybe you'll think this is another fudge. But there's a bit of a pattern of thought developing.

Verse 8 Abraham says.

⁸....., "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."

God will provide.

We'll both come back down the mountain. And God will provide.

The book of Hebrews in the New Testament gives you a bit of an insight – Abraham really had no idea but it says.

Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead

SLIDE

But let's just put ourselves out of our misery and follow these last painful bits of the story. There from verse 9.

⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ¹² "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him.

Talk about a close call. And if you couldn't imagine Abraham's grief on the way up the mountain. You sure won't be able to imagine his RELIEF..... now.

There's no play acting here. You can't fool God. Abraham was fully intending on plunging the knife. Now I know the angel says, that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.

Tough test. But Abraham comes through with flying colours. I'm not sure I would have. Abraham's faith is a great example.

And there's a few things to take away from his example. It's pretty clear that the faith test isn't a written one. Faith's a bit like a muscle. It has to actually be exercised to grow. Faith doesn't grow in a test tube. Faith grows in the smelting pot of the tough realities of life.

They're good things to take away from this. But I don't think that's the main thing.

See the test is, does Father Abraham hold God in awe; does he fear God, does Abraham respect God so much that he's actually prepared to do what he's told without **questioning God's promises**. Which for Abraham, makes a real change. This is the man who slept with his wife's slave girl to give God a bit of a hurry along. Who laughed when God said Sarah was going to give birth. Does he finally **fear God** enough to take him at his word? And he does. And he's vindicated. That's the point.

God promised. So **God will provide**. And to confirm it, as soon as the angel has spoken, Abraham looks around in verse 13, and sees a ram caught by its horns in a bush. And Abraham takes it, and he kills it, and sacrifices **the ram God has provided** as a burnt offering instead of his son.

See, even though doesn't know the details of HOW. He trusts that God will provide... And at the critical point of the story. He does.

Which is how Abraham wants it remembered.

So Abraham gives the place a new name. In verse 14 it says he calls the place "The **Lord** will provide." In Hebrew, it's **Jehovah Jireh**. God our provider. Because on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.

And that's our real point of connection with Abraham. The knowledge that God provides. See that's the proof, that's the vindication of his faith.

And it's the same for us because ultimately God provides. Not just a ram. But HIS OWN BELOVED SON, THE SON OF THE FATHER. The person of Jesus.

And if you think it's hard to come to terms with the torture Abraham went through in offering up his innocent son Isaac. Even though in the end he didn't have to go through with it.

You get a tiny little window into what it must have been like for the Father of all Fathers. To actually give up his innocent son from eternity. As the sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

See what you couldn't possibly imagine doing. What maybe infuriates you about God calling on someone to do because it's so unimaginable. God does. And Jesus obeys willingly.

And in the end. That's where all of God's promises point.

In the end. The cross of Christ is the vindication of God's trustworthiness.

Abraham didn't know the details. But he trusts God. And he looks forward. To the sacrifice God's going to provide. And we look back. And step out in faith. Because God's trustworthy.

You might start out thinking he's crazy to trust a God like that. In the end you're crazy not to.

The apostle Paul makes the statement that sometimes seems just too hard to believe. He says. In all things God works for the good of those who love him.

And just as you go through all those horrible things that have happened and you doubt that's the case. And a bit like Abraham you find it hard to comprehend. As you're struggling with it. Two verses later. Paul says this. Verse 31

Romans 8:31-32 If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

You see the logic. If God loves you so much. He's given up his Son. Then even when you can't possibly fathom the good. You can trust him.

Now let me just say. Because I need to be crystal clear here.

God's not asking you to sacrifice your kid, or your cat, or your house. He's not setting some bizarre outlandish test. Go walking through the venomous snakes compound at Australa zoo. Let me say very clearly, that's not demonstrating **faith in God's promises** at all. That's being a **lunatic**.

Abraham has got a **specific covenant from God**. And he's determined he's going to trust it.

And sometimes we can think faith is about making sacrifices. When God's already made the one sacrifice that needs to be made in Christ.

Paul says in Romans 12, Because God has **provided the sacrifice for us...** that the only sacrifice we can make is to live **holy lives. To give every part of yourself in sacrificial service.**

Listen to this. Romans 12 verse 1.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of **God's mercy...** to offer your bodies as **living sacrifices**, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.